

SPARTANS AND JEWS: ABRAHAMIC COUSINS?

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In a study about Abraham and the nations, a chapter on the relationship between Spartans and Jews cannot be absent, and stranger Jewish relatives than the Spartans are hardly imaginable. The connections between the two peoples, authentic or not, have often been analysed,¹ and in my contribution I will once again look at them but limit myself in my discussion to the most recent literature, in particular the studies by Momigliano, Gruen and Jones.² No new documents have turned up since the debate about the relationship started in the eighteenth century,³ but a fresh look can still offer some new insights, as I hope to show.

Our earliest, if indirect, source for a Jewish-Spartan relationship can be found in Hecataeus of Abdera's treatise *On Egypt*. This is also the oldest surviving work on the Jews in Greek literature, even though knowledge about them was already available in Peripatetic circles.⁴ Hecataeus probably wrote his work on Egypt around 315 BCE⁵ Jews had of course been in Egypt for many centuries, but after the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great and the consolidation of his power by Ptolemy I there was a great influx of Jewish immigrants, military and otherwise. Hecataeus, who came to Egypt in the entourage of Ptolemy, must have soon met some of those Jews in Alexandria. They will have stood out in the Egyptian society as people who were clearly non-Egyptian and non-Greek. Cohen has posed the question: "How do you know a Jew in antiquity when you see one?" The answer must have surely varied, depending on geography, but it is clear from papyri that Jews in Egypt were often

¹ For the older literature, see the bibliography in R. Katzoff, "Jonathan and Late Sparta," *AJP* 106 (1985): 485n1.

² E. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism* (Berkeley 1998); C.P. Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999); A. Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom* (Cambridge 1975).

³ P.E. Jablonski, *Opuscula* (4 vols.; Leiden 1804–1813), 3:261–286 ("De Lacedaemoniorum cum Iudaeis cognatione").

⁴ F. Dirlmeier, review of W. Jaeger, *Diokles von Karystos*, *DLZ* 59 (1938): 1836.

⁵ P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (3 vols.; Oxford 1972), 2:719–720.

described as “honey-coloured,”⁶ which is not surprising as the Egyptians themselves were not uncommonly of a dark countenance.⁷

However, Hecataeus did not single out physical differences or describe what he saw in Egypt, but he concentrated more on the situation in Palestine. In his discussion, which has come to us in an excerpt by Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca historica* 40.3),⁸ he describes how the Jews had been thrown out of Egypt, but had reorganised themselves in Palestine under the guidance of Moses to whose wisdom and courage he ascribes the present state of the country and its legislation. For our purpose the most interesting notice is the following:

The lawgiver [i.e., Moses] laid down many rules about military training, making the young practice courage, endurance, and in short, bear every kind of hardship. He also led expeditions against the neighbouring tribes and divided the large amount of land he had won into allotments. He gave lots of equal size to ordinary persons, but larger ones to the priests, so that they might enjoy larger incomes, and thus perform the service of God without cessation or distraction. Ordinary persons were forbidden to sell their own lots in case anybody was led by greed to buy lots, oppress the poor and cause depopulation. (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 40.30.6–7 [Jones, LCL; slightly adapted])

The various features strongly suggest the situation in Sparta, even if its name is not mentioned. This similarity cannot be chance and has often been noted,⁹ but the reason for this comparison has been insufficiently examined until now. Hecataeus’ source about the Jews must have been twofold. On the one hand, we can see the influence of Egyptians, probably priests,¹⁰ who are responsible for the beginning of Hecataeus’ report, in which he relates the Jewish expulsion from Egypt. On the other, there must have been Jews with a much more sympathetic take on their past. This is clear from the fact that Hecataeus can even quote the Torah, as he

⁶ S.J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness* (Berkeley 1999), 29–30.

⁷ For the (black) colour of the Egyptians, see most recently A. Cameron, *Callimachus and His Critics* (Princeton 1995), 233–236; J. den Boeft et al., *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXII* (Groningen 1995), 310; S. Walker and M. Bierbrier, *Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt* (London 1997).

⁸ Sometimes we can supplement Diodorus’ excerpt. E.g., Theophrastus (frg. 584A Fortenbaugh = Porphyry, *Abst.* 2.26) seems to have derived his information on Jewish sacrificial practice from Hecataeus, cf. W. Jaeger, *Diokles von Karystos* (Berlin 1938), 134–153, although this is contested by Dirlmeier (note 4).

⁹ Most recently: M. Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus* (2nd ed.; Tübingen 1973), 465 (hesitatingly); Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom*, 84; Gruen, *Heritage*, 261: “the parallel ... seems quite incontestable”; Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy*, 73–74.

¹⁰ F. Jacoby, *FGH* on Hecataeus F 6 (p. 50).

says at the end of his excursus: “At the end of their Laws there is even written that Moses spoke these words to the Jews having heard them from God” (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 40.3.6). The quote is not literal, although it seems to echo Deuteronomy (29:1), but it is hard to imagine an Egyptian priest coming up with these words. In passing, we may also note that we have here one of the earliest passages in post-Alexander the Great literature where we can see that the Pentateuch is referred to as a whole. On the basis of a comparison of Sir 39:1–3 and the Prologue to the same book, Sirach, van der Kooij has noted a tripartite division of “the Law, the prophets and the other books of our ancestors” at that time,¹¹ but our passage already suggests the existence of the Pentateuch as a separate whole in the late fourth century BCE¹² Momigliano even thought that “a pre-Septuagint translation of some sections of the Torah is not altogether incredible,”¹³ but to presuppose such translations within a good two decades after Alexandria’s foundation seems rather adventurous.

The earliest Alexandrian Jews must have been soon confronted with the problem of how to explain and justify their different lifestyle, both religious and secular. Hecataeus’ words that Moses “as a result of their own expulsion (*xenēlasian*) had introduced a way of life that was somewhat unsocial (*apanthrōpon tina*) and xenophobic (*miso xenon*)” (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 40.3.4) demonstrates that already at a very early stage of Alexandrian life the Jews had to counter Greek charges that they did not mix with other people and kept themselves separate. In order to defend themselves, they evidently developed the interesting strategy to compare their way of life with that of the Spartans. The latter similarly had a famous lawgiver, namely Lycurgus,¹⁴ and were known in

¹¹ A. van der Kooij, “Canonization of Ancient Hebrew Books and Hasmonean Politics,” in *The Biblical Canons* (ed. J.-M. Auwers and H.J. de Jonge; Leuven 2003), 27–38; A. van der Kooij, “The Canonization of Ancient Books Kept in the Temple of Jerusalem,” in *Canonization and Decanonization* (ed. A. van der Kooij and K. van der Toorn; Leiden 1998), 17–40.

¹² The passage has been overlooked by K. De Troyer, “When Did the Pentateuch Come into Existence? An Uncomfortable Perspective,” in *Die Septuaginta: Texte, Kontexte, Lebenswelten* (ed. M. Karrer and W. Kraus; Tübingen 2007), 269–286.

¹³ Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom*, 84.

¹⁴ For Moses as lawgiver see L. Feldman, “Parallel Lives of Two Lawgivers: Josephus’ Moses and Plutarch’s Lycurgus,” in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (ed. J. Edmondson et al.; Oxford 2005), 209–243; D. Timpe, “Moses als Gesetzgeber,” *Saec* 21 (1980): 66–77.

Greece as people that did not like, and even expelled, strangers.¹⁵ By comparing themselves to the xenophobic but illustrious Spartans, the Jews thus cleverly, if not always successfully, tried to legitimate their own special ways of life. From Hecataeus' description of Moses' military training we can even conclude that some Jews must have gone pretty far in elaborating the comparison, although from a historical point of view clearly much too far.

Yet the comparison must have been successful and was probably sustained by continuing Greek charges of misanthropy against the Jews. At least this conclusion is hardly avoidable from the notice in 2 Macc 5:9 that the high-priest Jason (175–172 BCE), after unsuccessful attempts at finding refuge among the Nabataeans and Egyptians, finally took ship to Sparta “because of their kinship (*syngeneian*)” and seems to have perished during this journey. We cannot be hundred percent certain that the words quoted were already in the source of our present text, the original by Jason of Cyrene which was probably written in the 150s BCE, but it seems not implausible. Hengel, followed by Habicht in his much praised translation and commentary on 2 Maccabees, suggests that the legend only originated in the time of Jason and in the circles of *Reformjudentum*,¹⁶ but this is improbable in the light of our discussion. If the legend would have been of such recent origin, Jason would have hardly taken it that seriously. The fact that his successor as high priest was called Menelaus (171–ca. 161 BCE), the name of the mythological king of Sparta during the Trojan War, is probably another indication of the legend.¹⁷

Our next testimonies are three letters, which I will discuss in chronological order, from 1 Maccabees, a book dated to the decades around 100 BCE¹⁸ The oldest two letters occur in chapter 12 in connection with an

¹⁵ For all sources for Spartan *xenēlasia* see T. Figueira, “*Xenēlasia* and Social Control in Classical Sparta,” *CQ* 53 (2003): 45n6.

¹⁶ C. Habicht, *Historische und legendarische Erzählungen: 2. Makkabäerbuch* (JSHRZ 1.3; Gütersloh 1976), 226n9a, who rightly rejects the idea that Jason's last journey points to the existence of a Jewish colony in Sparta, as still was accepted by Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 134, 410n682; Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom*, 89.

¹⁷ So, persuasively, Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 139; Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy*, 77.

¹⁸ For different datings, which range from 120–180 BCE, see Gruen, *Heritage*, 265n86 (“probably at the end of the second century BCE”); K.-D. Schunck, *Historische und legendarische Erzählungen: 1. Makkabäerbuch* (JSHRZ 1.4; Gütersloh 1980), 292 (ca. 120 BCE); E. Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (ed. and trans. G. Vermes et al.; 4 vols.; Edinburgh 1973–1986), 3.1:181 (“the first decades of the first century BC”).

embassy, consisting of Numenius and Antipater (12:16), sent by Jonathan (161–143 BCE) around 143 BCE to the Romans and Spartans. The names of the ambassadors are indicative of the early process of Hellenisation of Palestine.¹⁹ Antipater is a typically Macedonian name, in this case perhaps inspired by Alexander the Great's first successor, Antipater.²⁰ Numenius, on the other hand, was equally a proper Greek name, inspired by the celebration of the new moon, but also a Greek name carried by many Syrians and Phoenicians, where it translates the epichoric name "(Ben-)Chodesh."²¹ As we find the name "Chodesh" also in 1 Chr 8:9, a similar process may have taken place in Palestine.

Immediately following the text of the letter that Jonathan purportedly sent to the Spartans, we find a second letter from the Spartan king Areus. The letter is also quoted by Josephus who not only adapts the style to the phraseology of a genuine Greek letter,²² but also adds a new end.²³ I will give here first the text as we find it in 1 Maccabees and add the end as we find it in Josephus:

To Onias the high priest, Areus, king of the Spartans, greeting. It has been found in a document concerning the Spartans and the Jews that they are brothers and that they are of the stock (*genos*) of Abraham. Now that we know these things, you will do well to write us concerning your peace. We in turn write to you: your livestock and your belongings are ours, and ours are yours. We therefore command that they [i.e., the letter-carriers] apprise you concerning these things (1 Macc 12:19–23). Demoteles the letter-carrier will transmit this letter. The writing is square: the seal is an eagle clutching a serpent. (Josephus, *A.J.* 12.227 [Jones, LCL])

The protagonists of this letter are the Spartan king Areus (309/8–265 BCE) and, probably, the high priest Onias I. Gruen considers Onias II more likely, but the negative picture of the latter in Josephus (*A.J.* 12.157–

¹⁹ For early Greek names among the Jews, see also Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 118–120, 139; L. Grabbe, *The Early Hellenistic Period (335–175 BCE)* (vol. 2 of Idem, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period*; LSTS 68; London 2008), 144–146.

²⁰ T. Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity* (Tübingen 2002), 264–265.

²¹ O. Masson, *Onomastica Graeca Selecta* (3 vols.; Geneva 1990–2000), 3:173–174; overlooked by Ilan, *Lexicon*, 300.

²² T. Nisula, "Time Has Passed since You Sent Your Letter': Letter Phraseology in 1 and 2 Maccabees," *JSP* 14 (2005): 212–215.

²³ For a useful juxtaposition of letters from 1 Macc in Josephus' *A.J.*, see F. Francis, "The Parallel Letters of Josephus' *Antiquities* and 1 Maccabees," in *Tradition as Openness to the Future* (ed. F. Francis and R. Wallace; Lanham 1984), 161–174, albeit accompanied by a superficial analysis.

167) makes this less plausible.²⁴ In any case, it is beyond any reasonable doubt that this letter is not authentic.²⁵ First, there are the typical Semitic formulations of putting the name of the recipient first (20),²⁶ of asking after somebody's peace (22; cf. Gen 37:14; 43:27; Exod 18:7 etc.) and the offering of the livestock (23; cf. 1 Kgs 22:4; 2 Kgs 3:7), as if Sparta was still a nomadic society, like Israel at the times of Abraham. Second, it is unthinkable that a Spartan king would have claimed to be a descendant of Abraham. The lack of authenticity is confirmed, somewhat paradoxically, by Josephus' end. As Cardauns has well noted, such detailed information is not proof of authenticity but of forgery. Moreover, the letter-carrier with his Spartan name as well as several expressions of Josephus have been lifted straight from Xenophon (*Hell.* 7.1.32, 39).²⁷ Even the motif of the serpent-clutching eagle is probably derived from Greece, although it has also been found on lintels of late antique synagogues in the Golan.²⁸

However, there is a significant difference between Areus' letter in 1 Maccabees and Josephus that has not yet received the attention it deserves. In the Maccabean version Areus claims to have read in a document, which is of course not specified, that Spartans and Jews both have Abraham as their ancestor. Naturally, the forger could not let Areus say that this was traditional knowledge, but Areus' lack of surprise at suddenly finding a new ancestor is rather striking. Participants in modern television programs such as the BBC's "Who do you think you are?" would not get away with such a diffident attitude! Yet his belonging to Abraham's *genos* perfectly fits the notice that Jason sailed to Sparta because of their *syngeneia*. This clearly was the current legend among the Jewish upper-class in the first half of the second century BCE. Jose-

²⁴ Areus: P. Cartledge and A.J. Spawforth, *Hellenistic and Roman Sparta* (London 1989), 28–37; Gruen, *Heritage*, 254–256; G. Marasco, *Sparta agli inizi dell'età ellenistica: Il regno di Areo I* (Florence 1980). Onias I/II: Gruen, *Heritage*, 254n32 and the detailed discussion by J. VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile* (Minneapolis 2004), 124–137, with an unconvincing discussion of Areus' letter.

²⁵ The best analysis is by B. Cardauns, "Juden und Spartaner," *Hermes* 95 (1967): 317–319, with previous bibliography. M. Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem* (London 2007), 104; U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Hellenistische Dichtung in der Zeit des Kallimachos* (2 vols.; Berlin 1924), 1:43n1 already noted: "eine freche Fälschung."

²⁶ This is well observed by J. Goldstein, *1 Maccabees* (New York 1976), 460, who refers to J.A. Fitzmeyer, "Some Notes on Aramaic Epistolography," *JBL* 93 (1974): 211.

²⁷ Cardauns, "Juden und Spartaner," 319. The connection with Xenophon had already been noted by F.-M. Abel, *Les Livres des Maccabées* (Paris 1949), 222.

²⁸ M. Schmidt, "Adler und Schlange: Ein griechisches Bildzeichen für die Dimension der Zukunft," *Boreas* 6 (1983): 61–71; Y. Turnheim, "The Eagle and the Snake on Synagogue Lintels in the Golan," *RArch* 24 (2000): 106–113.

phus, however, speaks of an intimate relationship (*A.J.* 10.226: *oikeiotēs*). In the Greek world both terms, *syngeneia* and *oikeiotēs*, denoted relationships between cities or peoples. However, *syngeneia* was used in the case of blood relationship or common ancestry, whereas *oikeiotēs* indicated just close relationships.²⁹ Josephus clearly lived in a different world from Jason, and he knew it. In his time, claims of *syngeneia* would no longer be acceptable, and that is why he, much more subtly, opted for the Greek term *oikeiotēs*.

Let us now move on to the second letter. Given that Areus' letter is a fake, albeit an interesting one, any letter that refers to it must by necessity be suspect too. Is this also the case with Jonathan's letter? Let us take a closer look:

Jonathan the high priest, the senate of the nation,³⁰ the priests, and the remaining Jewish people to their brothers the Spartans, greeting. Already in time past a letter was sent to Onias the high priest from Areus, your king, that you are our brothers, as the appended copy shows. Onias welcomed the envoy with honour, and received the letter, which contained a clear declaration of alliance and friendship. Therefore, though we have no need of such relations, since we have as encouragement the holy books which are in our hands,³¹ we have endeavoured to send this letter to renew our brotherhood and friendship with you, so that we may not become alienated from you, for it is a long time ago since you sent your letter to us. We therefore remember you constantly on every occasion, both at our feasts and the other appropriate days, at the sacrifices which we offer and in our prayers, as it is right and proper to remember brothers. And we rejoice at your glory. But as for ourselves, many afflictions and many wars have encircled us and the kings around us have made war against us. We did not want to annoy you, the other allies and our friends in these wars, for we have the help from heaven coming to our aid, and we were rescued from our enemies, and our enemies were humbled. We therefore have chosen Numenius the son of Antiochus and Antipater the son of Jason, and have

²⁹ For the terms, see most recently E. Will, "Syngeneia, oikeiotēs, philia," *RPLHA* 69 (1995): 299–325; O. Curty, "La parenté légendaire à l'époque hellénistique: Précisions méthodologiques," *Kernos* 12 (1999): 167–194; O. Curty, "Les parentés entre cités chez Polybe, Strabon, Plutarque et Pausanias," in *Origines gentium* (ed. V. Fromentin and S. Gotteland; Paris 2001), 49–56; D. Musti, "La 'syngeneia' e la 'oikeiotēs': Sinonimi o nuances?," in *Linguaggio e terminologia diplomatica dall'Antico Oriente all'Impero Bizantino* (vol. 4 of *Antiqua et mediaevalia*; ed. M.G. Angeli Bertinelli and L. Piccirilli; Rome 2001), 43–63.

³⁰ On the *gerousia*, see Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 48–51.

³¹ For the expression "holy books" see J.N. Bremmer, "From Holy Books to Holy Bible: An Itinerary from Ancient Greece to Modern Islam via Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity," in *Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient Judaism* (ed. M. Popović; Leiden 2010), 327–360.

sent them to Rome to renew the former friendship and alliance with them. We have commanded them to go also to you, to greet you and deliver to you this letter from us concerning the renewal and our brotherhood. And now we would very much appreciate it if you send us a reply to this.

(1 Macc 12:6–18)

As with his report of the letter of Areus, Josephus supplies us with a version that is much more like the decrees of Greek cities in the Hellenistic period and does not contain embarrassing sentences (*A.J.* 13.166–170). However, unlike Jones, I would not conclude from this more tactful composition that Josephus' version is more authentic.³² As with the letter of Areus, he was just better informed and more sensitive to the world around him.

In fact, as especially Gruen has argued, the idea is hard to sustain that the Jews would have any advantage by approaching Sparta around that time.³³ It is also hard to imagine that the author of 1 Maccabees would have concentrated on the Spartans only and not mentioned anything from the letter to the Romans, if both letters would have been available in the Jerusalem archives. Moreover, the letter is puzzling from a practical point of view, as Jonathan does not require any specific help, is patently insincere, as it is unthinkable that the Jews would remember the Spartans during their sacrifices and festivals, and demonstrates a lack of awareness of the Spartan position after the Roman destruction of Corinth in 146 BCE³⁴ Finally, the letter is couched in terms that clearly go far beyond what was possible in contemporary diplomatic relations. Surely, if one wants good diplomatic contacts, the last thing to write is: we do not need your help for we have a much better, supernatural ally!

What about the third letter? According to the author of 1 Maccabees the Romans and “even the Spartans” were highly distressed when they heard about Jonathan's death (1 Macc 14:16). Once again the mention of Sparta looks like an afterthought, as the place in the sentence indicates and the fact that the verbs in the next two verses regard only the Romans.³⁵ In fact, after mentioning the letter on brass tablets that the Romans sent to renew the friendship and alliance with the Jews, which in itself is a pretty improbable detail, the transition to the letter of the Spartans is rather abrupt:

³² Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy*, 77–79.

³³ Gruen, *Heritage*, 257–258.

³⁴ J.R. Bartlett, *1 Maccabees* (Sheffield 1998), 96.

³⁵ See also J.T. Nelis, *I Makkabeeën* (Roermond 1972) and Schunck, *1. Makkabäerbuch*, ad loc.

And this is a copy of the letter which the Spartans sent: “The magistrates and the city of the Spartans to Simon the high priest, the elders, the priests and the rest of the Jewish people, our brothers, greeting. The envoys who were sent to our people have told us about your glory and honour, and we rejoiced at their coming. And what they said in the councils of the people we have recorded as follows: ‘Numenius the son of Antiochus and Antipater the son of Jason, envoys of the Jews, came to us to renew their friendship with us. It has pleased the people to receive these men with honour and to place a copy of their words in the State Archives, so that the people of the Spartans may have a record of them.’ And they have sent a copy of this to Simon the high priest.” (1 Macc 14:20–23)

Although some recent scholars still seem inclined to accept the authenticity of this letter,³⁶ this is rather unlikely: when the two earlier letters are not authentic, the third one can hardly be authentic either, as Gruen rightly observes.³⁷ And indeed, there are a number of questionable expressions in the letter. Although the letter mentions the envoys of Jonathan, the letter is addressed to Simon. Goldstein suggests that a private Jewish traveller reported the news of Jonathan’s execution while the envoys were in Sparta, but this ingenious suggestion clearly constitutes special pleading, just as his earlier, rather fantastic suggestion that Areus employed an Aramaic scribe to translate his letter into Aramaic.³⁸ The suggestion also passes over the fact that the vocabulary of the letter does not look Spartan at all and does not contain any specific Spartan expression. Moreover, the Greek is sometimes rather convoluted and employs typically Jewish–Greek expressions.³⁹ To start with, the combination of *archontes* and *polis* (14:20) is unique for Sparta, where we would expect mention of the *ephors*, but the combination does occur in early second-century Seleucid royal letters.⁴⁰ The same is true for the combination “glory and honour” (14:21), which we find from the middle of the third century BCE onwards in Seleucid royal letters.⁴¹ Jewish influence can also be seen in the term used for the high priest, as we find

³⁶ Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy*, 78; Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom*, 113–114.

³⁷ Gruen, *Heritage*, 258–259.

³⁸ Goldstein, *1 Maccabees*, 456–457 (Aramaic scribe), 492 (traveller).

³⁹ See especially Nelis, *I Makkabeeën*, ad loc.

⁴⁰ Compare C.B. Welles, *Royal Correspondence in the Hellenistic Period* (New Haven 1934), 43.2 (Nysa: early second century BCE), 45.2 (Pieria: 186 BCE), 75.1 (Susa: 21 CE = F. Canali de Rossi, *Iscrizioni dello Estremo Oriente Greco* [Bonn 2004], no. 218.2).

⁴¹ Welles, *Royal Correspondence*, no. 15.12 (after 261 BCE: Erythrae = *I. Erythrae* 31.11), 42.6 (ca. 196 BCE: Ilion = *I. Ilion* 37.6), 44.19–20 (189 BCE: Daphne), 52.37 (167/6 BCE: Miletus = *I. Miletus* 306.Ib.37); note also *I. Ilion* 32.33 (decree for Antiochus I: ca. 280 BCE).

here the Jewish expression *hiereus megalos* (14:20) instead of the usual diplomatic term *archieus*.⁴² The joy (14:21) of the Spartans over the “glory and honour” is undoubtedly also due to the author of 1 Maccabees who expresses joy at many occasions in his book.⁴³ Finally, the letter contains several obscure or non-diplomatic expressions such as *boulais tou dēmou* (14:22; not really clear), *epidexasthai* (14:23) instead of the usual *apodexasthai*,⁴⁴ and the curious *ta apodedeigmēna tōi dēmōi biblia* (14:23), which must mean something as “State Archives.” In short, the letter is a concoction of Seleucid terminology, Jewish vocabulary and bad Greek—hardly the characteristics we would expect in a Spartan letter.

With these letters we have come to the end of the Jewish-Spartan correspondence. Our conclusion must be that real diplomatic contacts never took place during the Maccabean and Hasmonean period, although that conclusion is hard to accept even for scholars who have questioned the authenticity of the letters.⁴⁵ The Essenes may have been influenced by Spartan ideas,⁴⁶ but real contacts between the two peoples would occur only much later, at the time of Augustus, when the Spartan dynast Eurycles went to Herod the Great, for reasons we do not know, as we have only the hostile report of Josephus (*B.J.* 1.513–531; *A.J.* 16.300–310). In any case, there is no evidence whatsoever to write as Cartledge and Spawforth do in a recent study of Eurycles: “the kinship between the Spartans and the Jews was by now an accepted fiction.”⁴⁷ More intriguing is the mention of a family of rabbis in late antique Israel who are all qualified by the name “Ben-Lakonia.”⁴⁸ Yet they too cannot be connected to the

⁴² Welles, *Royal Correspondence*, 318–319.

⁴³ Nelis, *1 Makkabeeën*, 214 compares 1 Macc 3:2, 7; 4:56, 58–59; 5:23, 54; 7:48; 10:66; 11:44; 12:12; 13:52; 14:11.

⁴⁴ Nelis, *1 Makkabeeën*, 214 compares Polybius, *Historiae* 2.39.4; 33.28.4; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 1.3.1. See also Welles, *Royal Correspondence*, 316.

⁴⁵ Cf., e.g., Cardauns, “Juden und Spartaner,” 321: “Eine tatsächliche diplomatische Beziehung zu Sparta soll aber nicht gänzlich ausgeschlossen werden,” although he does not adduce any evidence for such contacts.

⁴⁶ See the striking resemblance of ideas and practices as listed by S. Mason, “Essenes and Lurking Spartans in Josephus’ *Judean War*: From Story to History,” in *Making History: Josephus and Historical Method* (ed. Z. Rodgers; Leiden 2007), 219–261.

⁴⁷ Cartledge and Spawforth, *Hellenistic and Roman Sparta*, 100. For Eurycles, see also J.-S. Balzat, “Le pouvoir des Euryclides à Sparte,” *EC* 73 (2005): 289–301; H. Lindsay, “Augustus and Eurycles,” *RM* 135 (1992): 290–297; L. Ullmann and J. Price, “Drama and History in Josephus’ *Bellum Judaicum*,” *ScrCI* 21 (2002): 97–111.

⁴⁸ O. Amitay, “Some Ioudaio-Lakonian Rabbis,” *ScrCI* 26 (2007): 131–134.

theme of our book, as no data is available to explain their name. In any case, at that time the days in which Jews could claim kinship with the Spartans were long past.

But, if the letters are fakes, one wonders who faked them, when were they written, and what prompted their composition. These questions are of course not easy to answer and have not received the attention they deserve. Naturally, those scholars who defended the authenticity did not need to answer these questions, but even those who refuted their authenticity in great detail, such as Gruen,⁴⁹ have hardly concerned themselves with this issue. Yet Cardauns, like most commentators (Abel, Nelis,⁵⁰ Schunck), has rightly stressed that the present place of the letters in 1 Maccabees is rather problematic. The first two letters fit their context only loosely and in the case of the last letter hardly at all. This is clear from the fact that after the Spartan response to Jonathan's letter the author mentions that Simon sent Numenius to Rome (14:24), whose consul Lucius supposedly gave him letters of protection for passing through all kinds of states, from Ptolemy's Egypt to Arsaces' Parthia, Sparta included (15:23); needless to say, these letters are fictitious too.⁵¹ In fact, Goldstein (ad 1 Macc 14:16–24) and Schunck (ad 1 Macc 14:24) try to mend the problem by rearranging the text in different ways. For my purpose it is sufficient to note that this concern for the text points to a separate existence of these letters, as Cardauns and others indeed have concluded.⁵²

Such a separate collection of letters was not unique. At about the same time, in the middle of the second century BCE, the Jewish author Eupolemos (*FGH* 723 F 2) could quote letters from Solomon to Pharaoh Vaphres and the Phoenician king Souron (the biblical Hiram).⁵³ These letters use the biblical text, but also formulas of contemporary Hellenistic royal

⁴⁹ Gruen, *Heritage*, 253–268.

⁵⁰ Unfortunately, this excellent commentary has been overlooked by Goldstein, Schunck, and Goodman: *Batava non leguntur*.

⁵¹ However, the author of the passage should probably not be identified with that of the Spartan letters, as is concluded after a detailed discussion by J.-D. Gauger, *Beiträge zur jüdischen Apologetik: Untersuchungen zur Authentizität von Urkunden bei Flavius Josephus und im 1. Makkabäerbuch* (Cologne 1977), 297–306.

⁵² Cardauns, “Juden und Spartaner,” 322; similarly Gauger, *Beiträge zur Jüdischen Apologetik*, 20n23.

⁵³ The identification with Eupolemos, who served as an ambassador for Judas Maccabeus, is unpersuasively contested by Gruen, *Heritage*, 139–140.

correspondence,⁵⁴ just as we noted in the case of Areus' letter (above). In other words, in the middle of the second century BCE collections of letters circulated in Jerusalem that had to prove the importance of the Jews within the world at large—letters that used the biblical tradition but also, perhaps, Seleucid letters which were in the Jerusalem archives.

But did the author of 1 Maccabees copy these letters without thinking? This is clearly not the case, as a detail in the second letter demonstrates. Unlike 2 Maccabees, in which God plays an important role, 1 Maccabees speaks only from “heaven” when it refers to God.⁵⁵ The fact that this is also the case in the letter from Jonathan suggests a stylistic adaptation by the author of the letter. A detailed investigation of the vocabulary of 1 Maccabees by Nelis shows that Jonathan's letter contains both a number of words that do not occur elsewhere in the book as well as words and expressions that are typical of 1 Maccabees. Nelis persuasively concluded therefore that the author revised an already existing letter.⁵⁶ Moreover, as Nelis notes, 1 Macc 8 on Judas' contacts with the Romans is immediately followed by 1 Macc 9 with his death. Similarly, after Jonathan's embassy to the Romans and the letter to the Spartans, there follows his death (12:39–53; 13:23), and Simon's contacts with the Romans take place only after the capture of Jerusalem's citadel (14:16–19, 24). The letters, as Nelis suggests, were thus incorporated in passages about Roman treaties with the intention to relativize the value of those treaties and stress the power of God's help.⁵⁷

Yet even if it is not authentic, the first Spartan letter is still very important within the theme of this book, as Areus claims Abraham as the ancestor of both Spartans and Jews. The claim rests of course on God's promise that all nations will be blessed in Abraham (Gen 12:3; 17:5). This claim of kinship between Jews and other peoples must have been a *topos* in contemporary Judaism, which clearly was intent on raising the status of Abraham, who was made into a kind of culture hero by Eupolemos. We find the same intention also in a text of “Cleodemus the prophet who is also called Malchus” (FGH 727 F 1),⁵⁸ a text quoted by Eusebius (*Praep. ev.* 9.20), who quoted Josephus (*A.J.* 1.240), who quoted

⁵⁴ This was already seen by J. Freudenthal, *Alexander Polyhistor* (Breslau 1875), 109–112; see now Gruen, *Heritage*, 142.

⁵⁵ 1 Macc 3:18–19, 50, 60; 4:10, 24, 40, 55; 9:46; 12:15; 16:3.

⁵⁶ Nelis, *I Makkabeeën*, 17–19.

⁵⁷ Nelis, *I Makkabeeën*, 157.

⁵⁸ Note that the passage is completely misquoted by Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 2:963.

Alexander Polyhistor (*FGH* 273 F 102), the great Greek first-century BCE compiler of Jewish writings. The nature of Cleodemus' profession of "prophet" has not yet been satisfactorily explained, just as we do not know his ethnic origin. Yet it seems reasonable to accept Goodman's conclusion that he was a Jew.⁵⁹ His name, *Kleodēmos . . . ho kai Malchos*, displays the typically double name of Jews in the Diaspora, which often started with the Greek name, to be followed by the Jewish name.⁶⁰ Malchus ("King") is a typically Syro-Phoenician name, which was well known in Rome (witness Petronius' Trimalchio)⁶¹ and not current in Palestine, where the only known bearer of the name is the (Syrian?) slave whose ear was lopped off by Peter (John 18:10). As his genealogy combines Abraham's ancestry of Africa and Assyria, he may well have been a Phoenician Jew with contacts in North Africa or vice versa.⁶² Cleodemus' text clearly is another indication of the Jewish tendency to integrate itself into the world at large.

In the end, then, we have to discard the idea of the Spartans being relatives of the Jews. Yet we have also made a gain. We can now see that these "Spartan" letters must have played a role in the middle of the second century BCE in the cultural and religious debate between the Hellenizing Jews and those who advocated a strict adherence to the Law. In other words, it highlights the dispute between universalizers and particularists. We can see that debate only through a glass darkly, but the issues at stake have not lost their relevance for the Jews of today.⁶³

⁵⁹ Schürer, *History of the Jewish people*, 3.1:526–528.

⁶⁰ W. Ameling, *Kleinasien* (vol. 2 of *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis*; ed. W. Ameling; TSAJ 99; Tübingen 2004), 103; M.H. Williams, "The Use of Alternative Names by Diaspora Jews in Graeco-Roman Antiquity," *JSJ* 38 (2007): 307–327, who overlooked Cleodemus.

⁶¹ For this and other examples, see J.N. Bremmer, "Malchos 'King' and Trimalchio," *Mnem* 34 (1981): 395–396. Add to my Latin passages that explain Malchus as "King": Jerome, *Vit. Malch.*, 2: *Erat illic quidam senex nomine Malchus, quem nos Latine "regem" possumus dicere, Syrus natione et lingua.*

⁶² For Jewish genealogical speculations about Africa, see also Y. Modéran, "Mythe et histoire aux derniers temps de l'Afrique antique: À propos d'un texte d'Ibn Khaldûn," *RH* 303 (2001): 315–341.

⁶³ I am most grateful to Suzanne Lye for her skilful editing of my text. I would also like to thank Albertina Oegema and Marjan Pierhagen for their careful reading of my text.